

**Rethinking Education in Pakistan:
Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilities**

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The book under review is titled ‘Rethinking Education in Pakistan: Perceptions, Practices, and Possibilities’ (2010), authored by Dr. Shahid Siddiqui and published by Paramount Publishers. This book highlights the revival of educational mindsets of all stakeholders in terms of policy issues pertaining to teacher and teacher education, curriculum, school, home support, language, research, and assessment to bring a vibrant change in our national education system. The author has critically analysed Pakistan’s overall education system and highlighted the root causes that have brought pedagogical experiences in a malfunction condition. The book is bent more on improving the quality of scholastic experiences within the paradigm of available national resources in order to re-strengthen the weak areas of such educational practices that de-limit the fruits of education in a nation. The objective of the book is contextually ideological with emphasis on the foundation of education, current practices, and their consequences.

In the first section of this book titled ‘Education in Context’, the author explores the research of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that focuses upon two major aspects of development, that is, education and health. The content highlights

that in 2005, the average literacy rate was 58 percent in South Asia, net primary enrolment was 87 per cent, and 13 million children were out of school. Approximately, 6.5 million children are out of school, which is an alarming and incomparable situation. This enigmatic situation is deplorable and the national authorities should pay attention to improve the figures. Literacy and development are directly proportionate to one another. If the literacy rate remains high, the development graph of a nation would also rise simultaneously. The writer emphasizes that this plethora of unexplored youth if educated in skills and knowledge, could be better utilized for national development. This phenomenon is highlighted by the writer at different points. We have to

decide that either we follow the definition of literacy released by the Ministry of Education: “One who can read the newspaper and write simple letters in any language” (1998) or World Bank definition: “The ability to read and write a simple statement about one’s everyday life and do simple mathematical calculations,” because the national definition itself effects the literacy rate of Pakistan. The author highlights that the higher education can guarantee rapid economic development, but we need to bring some revolutionary changes in funding, planning, physical facilities, relevant syllabuses, governance, staffing quality teachers, salary of the teaching faculty, and infrastructure of the institute to provide full facilities required for the quality of educational experiences.

In the second section titled ‘Policy Issues’, the author highlights the policy inequalities of education sector of Pakistan where private educational institutions sell education. He probes

more deeply by highlighting neoliberalism and its repercussions on education system. The main purpose to highlight these issues is to revisit the educational policies of Pakistan. Higher education contributes to enhance the productivity of labor force and directly impacts economic growth. The writer emphasizes on additional rise in distribution for edification. In this section, he emphasises the contribution of the Higher Education Commission and asks all higher education institutions to ponder over the worth of degrees to maintain standards at an international level. Chapter five introduces the case study method with a focus on ethnographic research in education. The chapter underlines in detail the procedure followed for case study methodology and also elaborates on action research and its focal position in education, and points out variations and relationships among them.

The third section titled ‘Teacher Education’ focuses on the misconceptions in teacher’s beliefs and attitudes, which have seeped into the Pakistani educational system. The author explains that the educational practices are based to a large extent on fallacies that promote social inequalities. The writer suggests curbing these abnormalities through a systematic method by making use of continuing political, adaptive, individual, and holistic approaches. Educators need to embrace innovative and collaborative teaching methodologies to bring a vibrant change in the society. Under the sub-theme of going beyond skills, the author states that, “Just knowing is not enough, but doing plays a crucial part in one’s professional development” (p. 66). For example, if the faculty knows that Google groups are a rich source of collaborative and cooperative activities, then it should be actually used by faculty members as well. The author considers that the skills of a teacher educator are

amalgamation of opinions, information, and suppositions and all these elements make a schema of each individual teacher. He further elaborates that teachers' repertoires support to participate in different activities through problem solving, questioning, discussion, hands-on-activities, and buzz group activities.

In the fourth section titled 'Teaching Practices', the author highlights the key factors to bring about a change in the teacher's expertise. Pakistan has an orthodox culture in teacher training programmes and the needs of the teachers are not considered. This is true for both the teachers as well as trainers in terms of inaccessibility and quality of teacher education. Constant upward move has been observed in informal teaching in Pakistan. Another dilemma is that trainers do not cater to the needs of the teachers. The basic aim of workshops is to enhance meaningful learning, but in Pakistan, programmatic approach has been followed over the years. Schools conduct workshops just as a formality to show the number of training in their Annual Service Report (ASR). Similarly, school workshops are conducted to utilize budgetary allocation at the end of the fiscal year. A strong follow-up system of workshops and trainings is highly required for success and true learning. As a result, lack of ownership and responsibility has been found among these teachers and the quality of teaching stands nowhere with respect to international standards. The author elaborates that private tuition syndrome has spread like a virus in Pakistan. Initially the purpose of tuition was to facilitate weak students in specific subjects, but now it is the need of all students to get good marks. Tuition academies are promoting their services at a very high price to attract students for passing different board examinations. This happens due to lack of quality teaching in schools. Even when schools employ good teach-

ers, they earn extra money by luring their students to join the tuition centers where they are working. The disadvantage of tuition culture is that students are unable to think out of the box and depend on academics and the role of regular teachers becomes redundant. There is a dire need to rejuvenate the regular teacher's role and assessment system that should not be memory-based, which will curb the tuition system in existence.

In the fifth section titled 'Curriculum and Materials', the author focusses on the concept of curriculum as a continuum of development, but the policy makers forget that it is a complete implementation plan spread over the education system and the future of our generation depends on it. The writer mentions that a teacher is the key person to understand and develop curriculum for its effective implementation. He shares the philosophy of help-books which are useful and a short-cut to achieve the goals, but we need to find out authentic materials for meaningful learning.

In the sixth and the seventh sections of the book, the author discusses the school and the home environment. He elaborates the criteria of goodness of schools and shares that the schools should provide opportunities for holistic development of children. There must be an equal ratio of academic development, physical development, social development, and moral development in schools. The school management should focus not only on visible, but also on invisible aspects of the process of change in schools. Issues regarding corporal and physical punishment are also raised by the author. Teachers victimize the students by giving them physical punishment in different ways and place a negative tag on them. These affect the behaviour of the students. Such punishments act as a

barrier between the learner and the process of learning. The old notion of punishment should be replaced by alternative techniques to motivate students. The author dwells on the impact of home in the child's learning process. The writer indirectly talks about the role of parents in nurturing their children for a mutual understanding between biological and spiritual parents in the process of fostering them. At this point, parents need to trust the teacher and make their children realize that teachers are as respectable as parents. The author suggests that parents need to attend awareness sessions to know their role and limitations in school activities. This would empower them to work with other stakeholders and gradually improve the education system of Pakistan. Due to economic factors, the dropout rate from schools has been increasing in Pakistan. The writer highlights the sad fact of child labour, which forces them to forgo their studies to fulfill their basic needs and they ultimately get involved in criminal activities. The author suggests that at state level there should be vocational training, where counselling should also be part of such sessions.

In the eighth section on 'Language Issues', the writer emphasises that there is a gradual increase in the number of incompetent English language teaching teachers across the nation in general, which is of concern. He reveals that language cannot be considered as a linguistic occurrence, but it is considered as a social and political fact which directly affects the economy as well. The author suggests that the two approaches which are most suited in our context are: (a) teacher-fronted approach which increases learner's pragmatic proficiency, and (b) collaborative approach which enhances cooperative learning. Higher education institutes have taken the initiative to teach communication skills and English language courses at graduate and post-graduate

level to produce.

In the ninth and tenth sections titled 'Research and Assessment' and 'Innovative Practices', the author highlights the importance of two different paradigms, that is, qualitative and quantitative research in the Pakistani context. He defines the standard criteria of a good research in length. PhD scholars should take part in the latest research to upgrade their knowledge and universities should conduct frequent seminars to promote their research work. The author shares that our educational assessment from primary to master's level is based on cramming of knowledge. No critical thinking and reflection is required to solve the papers. Students are bound to memorise long answers and get position in their respective classes because their parents expect them to get highest marks in the classes. If it does not happen, they consider their child as weak and slow in learning which causes low self-esteem in the child. He suggests that collaboration is required in the examination system among educational institutes, examination boards, and assessment experts to help make papers to enhance the higher order thinking skills of the students.

Critique

The book is based on issues and useful suggestions and recommendations for the educational system of Pakistan to achieve desired results. Star teachers could initiate to bring about a vibrant change in our society by following these suggestions. The crux of the entire review is that learning beyond schooling is the root of personality building, which starts from mother. To bring a fundamental change in the education landscape, this book highlights different scenarios of education system at all levels and tries to give applicable

suggestions, but from where we need to step-up would be decided by the individual teachers according to their context. The book is inclined more towards the quality of educational experiences within the standard of existing nationwide resources in order to reinforce the deteriorating areas of such educational practices that demarcate the fruits of education in a nation.

The author could have included few success stories for inspirational purpose to show that things are doable and efforts are successful even in forlorn scenarios. Positive and heart-warming stories from educators as well as students can perform as a catalyst to bring a gradual change in our education system at all levels. Such motivating stories could directly impact teacher-student relationship and student-student relationship both inside and outside the classroom. It has been observed by teachers that these stories help to increase respect, cooperation, motivation, and the ability to solve peer conflicts. In a nutshell, the book is a treasure which should be owned by all, who support the idea of quality education in Pakistan.